

Salasika

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Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in The Workplace: Patterns and impact on women employed in the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) is an emerging and less explored dimension of workplace violence. This is particularly so in the hospitality sector, where women often occupy vulnerable, customer-facing roles. Despite increasing global recognition, little empirical evidence exists from low- and middle-income countries such as Zimbabwe, where digitalization intersects with entrenched gender and labor inequalities. This paper investigates the patterns, impact, and institutional responses to TFGBV among women employed in Zimbabwe's hospitality sector. A mixed-methods design was used, combining survey data from women working in the hospitality sector with document and policy analysis. Interpreted through feminist political economy and intersectional lenses, our findings demonstrate how digital technologies reproduce structural inequalities in feminized labor sectors, transforming existing vulnerabilities into new sites of control and exploitation. Unwanted sexual messages, online slander, and non-consensual image sharing were the most prevalent forms of TFGBV, frequently perpetrated by supervisors, colleagues, and clients. Further analysis showed that these digital abuses are embedded in workplace hierarchies and gendered power relations, resulting in psychosocial and economic harm, at the same time silencing women through fear of retaliation and weak institutional redress. Current workplace and national frameworks insufficiently address TFGBV, lacking specificity, enforcement, and survivor-centered safeguards. As such, TFGBV is both a digital rights and labor rights concern requiring gender-responsive reforms in Zimbabwe's labor industry.

KEYWORDS: *technology-facilitated gender-based violence, hospitality, workplace safety, feminist political economy, digital rights, Zimbabwe.*

INTRODUCTION

The discourse around gender-based violence (GBV) has historically focused on physical and sexual forms. The digital realm presents difficulties that necessitate a distinct conceptual understanding of Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), distinguishing it from traditional forms of violence by its reliance on technological platforms for perpetration. TFGBV represents an emergent global challenge that disproportionately affects women and girls, as well as marginalizing communities through various digital platforms (Bansal et al., 2023; Quilty & Flynn, 2025). This emerging violence comprises various abusive behaviors, including digital dating abuse, intimate partner cyberstalking, image-based sexual abuse, and online sexual harassment. The violence is facilitated through GPS tracking, spyware, social media platforms, and other digital tools (Henry et al., 2020; Afrouz, 2021). Despite the growing prevalence, empirical research on TFGBV remains scarce, with gaps in evidence from several regions and a limited understanding of effective interventions (Sheikh & Rogers, 2023; Philbrick et al., 2022).

Scholars emphasize that TFGBV requires conceptual frameworks that move beyond viewing technology as merely facilitating traditional violence, instead recognizing the intersection of human, social, and technical factors (Powell & Henry, 2017). The concept of "technology-facilitated coercive control" highlights how digital media platforms both mediate and regulate patterns of abuse within relationships and structural inequalities (Dragiewicz et al., 2018). TFGBV must be understood through structural and intersectional lenses, as individualistic approaches risk trivializing digitally mediated harms and missing opportunities for systemic intervention (Bailey & Burkell, 2021).

The hospitality sector, globally and specifically in regions such as Zimbabwe, presents a particular vulnerability to TFGBV due to its innate characteristics. This sector is largely public-facing, involving extensive interactions between staff, guests, and the broader public, often mediated through digital platforms for bookings, reviews, and marketing purposes. Globally, although women constitute the majority of the tourism and hospitality workforce, they remain under-represented in management and leadership roles (Hutchings et al., 2020; Silva & Couto, 2023; De Carvalho, 2017). This numerical dominance does not translate into equitable career advancement, with women often concentrated in part-time, low-paid positions that frequently extend into domestic roles, such as housekeeping and room service (Silva & Couto, 2023; Cave & Kilic, 2010).

The feminization of care work in the hospitality sector, where women are often assigned roles emphasizing attentiveness and emotional labor (Coffey et al., 2023), inadvertently heightens their exposure to violence, including technology-facilitated forms. Likewise, the tourism and hospitality industry's growing reliance on ICTs for operations, customer engagement, and communication, while boosting efficiency and reach, simultaneously creates new digital vulnerabilities for female employees. This digital transformation, while it offers potential for service delivery, also opens doors for new modes of violence. The challenge is compounded in the Zimbabwean context, where gender inequality persists across education, employment, and leadership contexts. Studies consistently show that women face significant inequities, and

GBV is a human rights violation rooted in these inequalities (Siziba et al., 2022; Goredema & Muwanzi, 2023).

TFGBV in the workplace, particularly in the global south, remains understudied. Existing research often focuses on high-income countries, leaving a gap in understanding the prevalence and impact of TFGBV in low- and middle-income countries. The dearth of research in this area implies that women's experiences of digital violence and their consequences are often silenced, mirroring a trend where women's experiences of violence are neglected in mainstream discussions. This study seeks to amplify these voices and contribute to a more inclusive understanding of GBV in contemporary workplaces. Specifically, it addresses the hospitality and tourism sector in Zimbabwe. To achieve this, the research sought to answer three questions:

1. What forms and patterns of TFGBV are experienced by women in the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe?
2. What are the impacts of TFGBV on affected women in the workplace?
3. How effective are existing workplace policies and legal frameworks in addressing TFGBV in the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding TFGBV

TFGBV encompasses a range of abusive behaviors perpetrated through digital platforms, including online sexual harassment, cyberstalking, image-based sexual abuse, and digital coercion (Henry & Powell, 2018; Bailey et al., 2021). Research demonstrates TFGBV is a global challenge affecting both high-income and low- and middle-income countries, with notable prevalence in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia (Makinde et al., 2021; Sheikh & Rogers, 2023; Bansal et al., 2023). Studies have consistently shown that women, girls, and sexual minorities are disproportionately affected, with young women being overrepresented as victims (Henry & Powell, 2020; Bansal et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated incidents of technology-facilitated violence (Bansal et al., 2023). Research in Sub-Saharan Africa confirms that men also experience TFGBV, albeit less frequently, with women more frequently reporting repeated sexual requests and men experiencing violent threats (Makinde et al., 2021). Despite its pervasive nature, empirical research on TFGBV remains limited, particularly in non-Western contexts, highlighting gaps in understanding its prevalence and impact (Henry & Powell, 2020; Quilty & Flynn, 2025).

Research identifies several key typologies of TFGBV, including cyber harassment, which involves persistent unwanted digital communication aimed at distressing individuals (Henry & Powell, 2020; Powell & Henry, 2017). Cyberstalking represents a more severe form involving electronic stalking that often escalates to threats and creates significant fear (Henry & Powell, 2020). Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) involves non-consensual creation or distribution of intimate images, causing devastating long-term impact on victims (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2022; Henry & Powell, 2016). Closely related to IBSA is doxing, which is publishing private or identifying information online

without consent and represents a form of gendered harassment motivated by extortion, silencing, and retribution (Anderson & Wood, 2021; Eckert & Metzger-Riftkin, 2020). These behaviors show a gendered pattern, with women experiencing higher victimization rates in certain categories, while men show higher perpetration rates (Powell & Henry, 2016; Gámez-Guadix et al., 2022).

At this stage, it is critical to distinguish between TFGBV and offline GBV. Both forms of violence share underlying motivations linked to control, power, and gender inequality, but their mechanisms and consequences differ in three main ways (Rani et al., 2023). Offline GBV, including sexual violence, (intimate) partner violence (IPV), and child marriage, is often rooted in patriarchal attitudes and traditional gender norms. On the other hand, TFGBV exploits the internet and digital technologies, enabling perpetrators to act with a degree of anonymity that is often harder to achieve in offline contexts. This anonymity can embolden perpetrators and complicate identification and prosecution. Secondly, the geographical reach of TFGBV is virtually limitless; an act committed from one location can affect a victim anywhere in the world, transcending the physical boundaries that limit offline GBV. Thirdly, the potentially permanent nature of digital content means that once images, messages, or information are shared online, they can be difficult, if not impossible, to fully erase, leading to prolonged victimization. This persistent digital footprint can continue to harm victims long after the initial incident. For instance, research indicates that TFGBV can continually contribute to mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and behavioral disorders, particularly among adolescents (Bailey & Burkell, 2021).

TFGBV also presents challenges for evidence collection and legal frameworks. Digital evidence requires specialized forensic techniques, and legal systems are still evolving to address these technologically mediated forms of violence (Bailey & Mathen, 2017; Henry & Powell, 2016). Research reveals that mechanisms of moral disengagement in TFGBV vary based on participant gender, sexist beliefs, and victim-perpetrator relationship, with higher levels of disengagement observed among men and individuals holding sexist attitudes (Martínez-Bacaicoa et al., 2023). The internet's "toxic disinhibition" escalates sexual aggression, as individuals feel less accountable online than in face-to-face interactions (Zhong et al., 2020). Online environments facilitate moral disengagement through reduced social-emotional cues and ease of communication dissemination (Runions & Bak, 2015).

TFGBV causes mental health challenges across diverse populations. Research demonstrates that TFGBV affects women across demographic groups and may even harm individuals without direct internet access (Martinez et al., 2023). Among adolescents, TFGBV manifests in various forms and causes psychological challenges, including anxiety (38%), low self-esteem (25%), and mental distress (18%), with 58% of girls across 22 countries reporting experiences of online harassment (Ayodeji, 2025).

GBV in the workplace

GBV in all its forms manifests in the workplace, in contemporary times, through digital harassment targeting women employees. This is supported by both global and regional evidence, stressing its pervasive nature and impact on mental health, job satisfaction, and safety (Saungweme et al., 2024; Sterud & Finne, 2022). Industries with high online visibility, such as IT, media, and service sectors, are particularly susceptible to this experience. The hospitality and tourism sectors, central to feminist labor studies, exemplify how gendered vulnerabilities, precarious contracts, and multi-faceted customer-worker relationships exacerbate the risk of TFGBV.

Scholarship indicates that victims of workplace sexual harassment, including digital forms, face poor physical and mental health outcomes (Blindow et al., 2024). Digitalization further complicates this, as evidenced by the rapid adoption of digital tools across various sectors, which, while facilitating operational efficiency, also introduces new avenues for harassment. The reliance on digital platforms for customer interaction and service delivery in the hospitality and tourism industry intensifies this exposure. For instance, the use of chatbots and other advanced technologies in hospitality creates new interaction points that could be exploited for digital harassment (Kumar et al., 2025; Otegui et al., 2024), despite their intended purpose of improving efficiency and customer experience.

Feminist labor studies reveal that women in hospitality and tourism face pervasive sexual harassment within risky employment conditions. The workforce is predominantly female, concentrated in low-paid, temporary positions with limited opportunities for career advancement (Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2011; Martínez-Gayo & Quintana, 2020). Sexual harassment is normalized across multiple hospitality sectors, from hotel room attendants experiencing guest-initiated harassment (Kensbock et al., 2014) to spa therapists enduring client misconduct (Frost et al., 2021). Power imbalances between employers, customers, and female employees create environments where harassment thrives with impunity (Vizcaino et al., 2020; Hadjisolomou et al., 2023). Workers often feel compelled to tolerate harassment due to precarious employment conditions and a lack of management support (Hadjisolomou et al., 2023). These conditions result in health risks, emotional labor demands, and high staff turnover, while perpetuating systematic exploitation of women workers (Sarosi, 2017).

Customer abuse and harassment in hospitality and tourism sectors represent endemic workplace crimes that are systematically normalized and underestimated (Mitsakis et al., 2024). Research demonstrates that verbal abuse and sexual harassment from customers are the most prevalent forms of misbehavior, commonly dismissed as “part of the job” and “not a big deal” (Booyens et al., 2022). The structure of the service economy itself endogenously creates conditions that enable customer abuse through promotion of customer sovereignty, weak labor positions, and status imbalances between customers and workers (Korczynski & Evans, 2013). Women employees face particular challenges, with sexual harassment being a silenced experience that disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, including migrant workers and

young employees (Vizcaino et al., 2020). Management often expects workers to tolerate abusive behavior, with dismissive attitudes to incident reports constituting “social washing” (Booyens et al., 2022). The nature of the hotel industry and power imbalances between guests and staff further exacerbate harassment issues (Guerrier & Adib, 2000).

Policy and legal frameworks

Zimbabwe's legal framework provides for addressing GBV, though specific provisions for TFGBV in the workplace require further strengthening. Section 56 of the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe guarantees gender equality, with Section 51 protecting inherent human dignity, thereby providing a legal basis to challenge all forms of violence, including technology-enabled abuse (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013). These constitutional provisions support other legislative efforts aimed at safeguarding individuals from discrimination and harm.

The Labor Act (Chapter 28:01) is a key instrument for regulating employment relations and prohibiting unfair labor practices, including sexual harassment. However, the increasing prevalence of digital platforms necessitates a review of the Labor Act's scope to include cyber harassment and technology-enabled abuse within workplace environments. Research indicates that technology enables new virtual forms of violence and exacerbates existing ones, highlighting the urgent need for legal adaptation. The traditional understanding of workplace harassment, which often focuses on physical proximity, needs to evolve to address digital interactions that occur beyond physical location.

Complementing the Labor Act is the Cybersecurity and Data Protection Act (2021), a more recent legislative development designed to combat cybercrimes such as cyberbullying, online harassment, and the non-consensual distribution of intimate images. This Act holds significant relevance for employees who may encounter TFGBV through digital communications, online systems, or social media interactions related to their work. Its provisions, particularly Part XI Section 33, offer avenues for legal recourse against perpetrators of online abuse, thus by extension provide for a safer digital environment for women in the workplace. However, the effective application of this Act requires clear guidelines on its interaction with labor laws in addressing workplace-specific digital harassment.

Workplace Human Resources (HR) policies and codes of conduct serve as essential operational tools for addressing TFGBV across all sectors. These policies are expected to proactively include explicit provisions that safeguard employees from technology-enabled harassment, thereby moving beyond general anti-harassment statements. Comprehensive HR policies should define digital harassment, establish clear reporting mechanisms that ensure the safety and confidentiality of victims, and implement mandatory anti-harassment training covering online conduct and behavior. Effective grievance-handling procedures and punitive measures for verified violations are also essential and must align with national laws and international standards.

Comparative perspectives from international and regional frameworks offer valuable guidance for Zimbabwe. The International Labor Organization (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), sets an international benchmark by explicitly recognizing and addressing violence and harassment in the world of work, including those occurring through information and communication technologies (Larion, 2024). This convention advocates for the inclusion of its provisions in national laws, urging member states to adopt a gender-responsive approach to preventing and addressing violence and harassment.

Regionally, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development also addresses workplace gender equality and advocates for measures to eliminate GBV. Member states, including Zimbabwe, are encouraged to establish mechanisms that protect employees from all forms of workplace violence, including both physical and digital forms (van Eerdewijk & van De Sand, 2014). Learning from SADC countries that have successfully implemented effective workplace digital ethics and harassment policies can provide practical models for Zimbabwe. The high incidence of GBV within the SADC region, with at least 68% of women experiencing some form of GBV during their lifetime (UNICEF, 2023), further underscores the urgency of such collaborative action.

Theoretical framework

TFGBV in the workplace necessitates a holistic theoretical and conceptual framework that adequately captures its manifold nature and impact. This framework draws upon the feminist political economy of labor, intersectionality, and organizational behavior and workplace violence frameworks, each framework offering distinct yet complementary lenses through which to analyze this tech-driven violence. These three frameworks allow for an inclusive understanding of how gender, power, precarious work conditions, and social identities intersect to shape experiences of TFGBV.

Feminist political economy

Feminist political economy provides a lens for understanding how gender, work, and power intersect to create vulnerabilities for women in precarious industries. Research demonstrates that structural inequalities in the hospitality and tourism sectors expose women to sexual harassment, with gendered roles and power imbalances increasing risks for vulnerable groups, including migrant and young employees (Vizcaino et al., 2020). The devaluation of feminized care work renders women's contributions invisible while augmenting exploitation (Reyes & Sutton, 2021). Digital platforms in the hospitality sector, particularly those that exploit migrant women, often operate within regulatory contexts that perpetuate intersectional inequalities (Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2023; Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2022).

These structural vulnerabilities create mechanisms where women workers face heightened risks of violence and harassment across industries (Minnotte &

Legerski, 2019; True, 2012). This framework positions TFGBV not as an individual act but as a systemic issue rooted in political and economic structures that perpetuate gender inequality in the workplace. It provides a critical perspective on how the inherent precarity of labor in industries like hospitality, combined with existing gender hierarchies, creates environments conducive to technology-facilitated abuse.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality explains how social and political identities, such as class, age, race, and gender, converge to create unique experiences of discrimination and privilege in cases of TFGBV. This framework recognizes that women employees are not a monolithic group; their experiences of TFGBV are shaped by the intersections of their identities. Research indicates that women's experiences cannot be understood solely through gender but must consider how gender intersects with other identity markers, such as race, class, age, and marital status (Kumar et al., 2023; Zigomo, 2022). For instance, studies of Indigenous women have revealed certain intersections, where ethnicity and gender create compounded challenges in entrepreneurship and experiences of violence (Croce, 2019; Nayak, 2024).

This intersectional approach moves beyond treating women as a homogeneous group and recognizes that social identity categories operate simultaneously to produce varied experiences of marginalization and privilege (Smooth, 2013; Ordaz & Rodrigo, 2015). Similarly, women in Zimbabwe may experience TFGBV differently depending on their socio-economic status, age, marital status, and other social markers. Younger women, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, or women with specific ethnic or racial identities, might face amplified vulnerabilities. Therefore, an intersectional approach prevents simplistic interpretations; instead, it highlights the power dynamics that produce varied forms and impacts of TFGBV on women workers.

Organizational behavior

Organizational behavior and workplace violence frameworks provide direct insights into the manifestations, prevalence, and consequences of harassment within an organizational context. These frameworks analyze the dynamics of workplace violence, which encompasses physical assault, verbal abuse, and sexual harassment, and their significant impact on employees' well-being and organizational productivity. For example, a study on health workers in Ghana revealed that verbal abuse was the most common form of workplace violence, affecting 53.4% of surveyed individuals, while sexual harassment affected 7.4% (Tawiah et al., 2024). While this study focuses on healthcare, these patterns of abuse are often mirrored in customer-facing roles within the hospitality sector, where employees frequently interact with the public.

The hospitality sector faces similar challenges, with sexual harassment affecting employee wellbeing despite conformance behaviors used as coping strategies (Oriade et al., 2023). These frameworks identify organizational

consequences, including reduced productivity, compromised work attitudes, and a damaged corporate image (Asamani, 2016), while also highlighting the need for all-inclusive prevention strategies, such as improved reporting systems, training programs, and policy interventions (Lim et al., 2022). The framework further enables the identification of risk factors within organizational structures and cultures that facilitate TFGBV, including inadequate policies, lack of reporting mechanisms, or a culture of impunity. It also guides the development of targeted prevention and intervention strategies, such as comprehensive training, clear codes of conduct, and accessible support systems for victims.

These lenses collectively offer a holistic understanding of TFGBV in the Zimbabwean hospitality sector. The feminist political economy of labor exposes the systemic roots of vulnerability in precarious work, while intersectionality clarifies how diverse social identities shape individual experiences of TFGBV. Organizational behavior and workplace violence frameworks provide practical tools to analyze specific incidents and design effective responses at the organizational level. As such, the research can move beyond merely describing incidents of TFGBV to analyzing the structural causes, manifestations, and impacts on employed women, thereby informing more effective policy and intervention strategies.

METHODS

This research adopted a mixed-methods approach that combined survey research with document and policy analysis. Primary data was collected through a Google Form survey distributed to 100 women employed in the hospitality industry in Hwange and Victoria Falls. These cities were purposively selected due to their prominence as tourism hubs and the high concentration of women working in the hospitality industry. The survey included both closed- and open-ended questions, aligned with the research objectives, focusing on the forms and patterns of TFGBV, its impact on women's well-being and work performance, and perceptions of workplace and legal responses. Responses were anonymized to ensure confidentiality and reduce the risk of re-traumatization.

Secondary data consisted of workplace policies, organizational codes of conduct, and relevant national legal frameworks governing GBV and workplace rights. All data were analyzed thematically: survey responses were coded to identify recurring patterns and themes, while policy documents were examined in relation to international standards on workplace protection.

FINDINGS

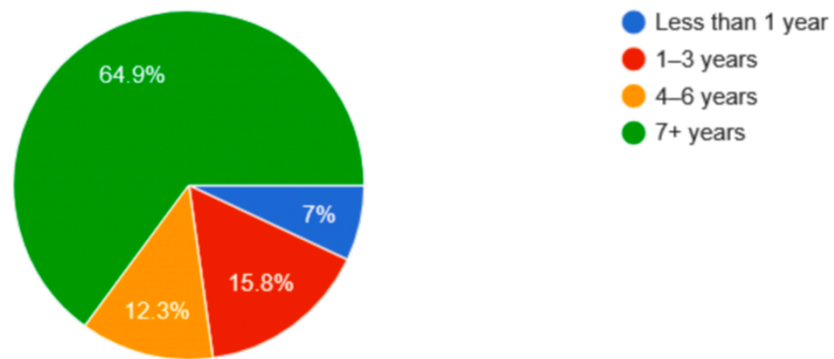
The findings from the survey on TFGBV in the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe provide insights into the experiences of women working in this industry. This section elaborates on these findings, drawn from 57 respondents from the Hwange and Victoria Falls areas, and is structured according to the research questions. Both qualitative and quantitative data are incorporated where appropriate to enrich the analysis.

Table 1. Age range and job description of respondents

Age * Job description Crosstabulation

| Count | | Job description | | | | | Total |
|-------|-------|--------------------|----------------------|------------------|----------|--------------------|-------|
| | | Front office staff | Administrative staff | Managerial staff | Waitress | Housekeeping staff | |
| Age | 18-24 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| | 25-34 | 10 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 18 |
| | 35-44 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 10 | 13 | 25 |
| | 45+ | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 2 | 9 |
| Total | | 15 | 10 | 7 | 10 | 15 | 57 |

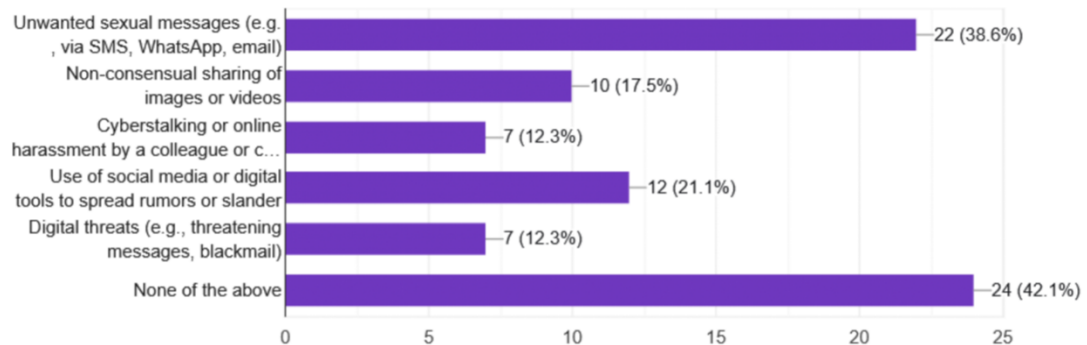
Figure 1. Length of service in the hospitality industry



Thirty-seven respondents have worked in the industry for more than 7 years, which is reflective of a fairly long tenure and offers an informed basis for assessing the TFGBV issues under consideration.

Forms and patterns of TFGBV

Figure 2. Forms of TFGBV



The survey data indicate a notable prevalence of various forms of TFGBV among women working in the tourism and hospitality sector in Zimbabwe, aligning with those discussed in the literature (see Bailey et al., 2021). Out of 57 respondents, 39 reported experiencing at least one form of TFGBV. The most frequently reported forms highlight the various digital avenues through which such violence manifests.

Unwanted sexual messages, sent through platforms such as SMS, WhatsApp, and email, emerged as the most common form of TFGBV. For instance, one administrative staff respondent aged 25-34, with over seven years of experience, reported experiencing unwanted sexual messages, alongside non-consensual sharing of images or videos, the use of social media to spread rumors, and digital threats. Another respondent, a waitress aged 35-44 with over seven years of experience, also reported receiving unwanted sexual messages, suggesting that direct digital communication channels are frequently exploited for harassment.

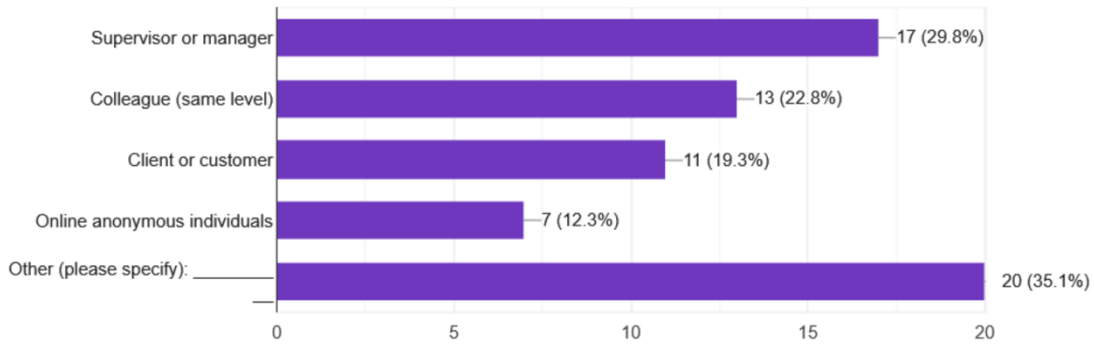
The use of social media or other digital tools to spread rumors or slander was also widely reported. The ease with which information, whether factual or false, can be disseminated online makes this a potent tool for character assassination and reputational damage within the workplace and beyond. Non-consensual sharing of images or videos, a deeply invasive form of TFGBV, was reported by several respondents. A respondent in the "Other staff" category, aged 35-44 with over seven years of experience, specifically mentioned experiencing this form of abuse. Another housekeeping staff member aged 45 and above, also with over seven years of experience, reported both non-consensual sharing and cyberstalking. These incidents highlight a breach of privacy and trust, often leading to significant distress for the victims.

Cyberstalking or online harassment by a colleague or client, involving persistent and unwanted online contact or monitoring, was also noted. An administrative staff member aged 45 and above with over seven years of experience reported experiencing cyberstalking in addition to non-consensual sharing of images or videos. This form of TFGBV can create a constant sense of unease and fear, blurring boundaries between professional and personal life. Digital threats, such as threatening messages or blackmail, were less frequently reported than unwanted sexual messages but remain a serious concern. A front office staff member aged 45 and above with over seven years of experience reported receiving digital threats. These incidents can induce significant fear and psychological distress, potentially impacting job performance and personal safety.

The data reveals a triangulated picture regarding the identity of perpetrators, indicating that TFGBV is not confined to external actors but can also originate from within the workplace environment. Supervisors and managers were identified as perpetrators by a significant number of respondents. This is particularly concerning, as it indicates a global pattern (see Ali et al., 2024 & van der Griend & Hilfinger, 2014) and signals an abuse of power, where individuals in authority use digital platforms to harass or intimidate subordinates. The fear of retaliation or job loss often prevents victims from reporting incidents

involving their superiors, as widely noted in the literature (see La Lopa & Gong, 2020, and Mensah, 2019).

Figure 3. Perpetrators of TFGBV

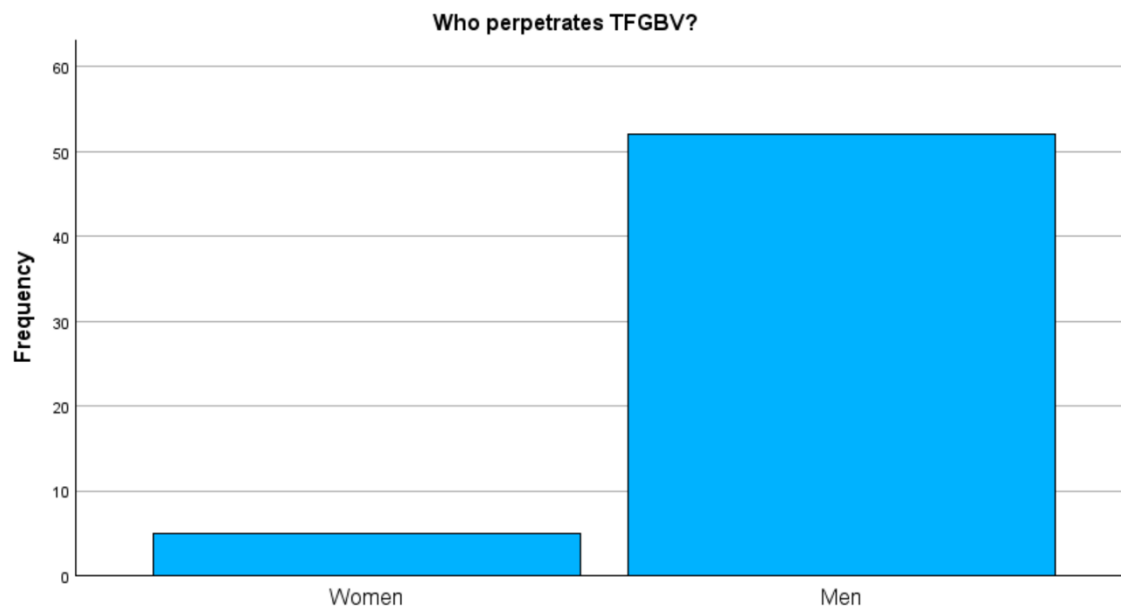


Colleagues were also frequently cited as perpetrators, suggesting that internal workplace relationships may be sources of TFGBV, potentially stemming from personal conflicts, jealousy, or a lack of awareness about appropriate digital conduct. Given the service-oriented nature of the hospitality sector, clients and customers also emerged as perpetrators, highlighting the vulnerability of hospitality workers to harassment from external parties who may feel entitled to engage in inappropriate behavior through digital channels. Some instances of TFGBV were attributed to anonymous online individuals, making it challenging for victims to identify and address the source of harassment. Such anonymity can embolden perpetrators and make victims feel more helpless.

Figure 4. Frequency of TFGBV



Figure 5. Who perpetrates TFGBV?



The frequency of TFGBV experiences varied among respondents. This variation highlights that, while not universal, TFGBV is a recurring issue for a significant segment of the workforce. Most incidents occurred on personal messaging platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, SMS), which are commonly used for both personal and professional communication and are frequently exploited for TFGBV. Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram), with their public or semi-public nature, provide fertile ground for rumor-spreading, slander, and cyberstalking. Even platforms designed for professional communication within organizations, such as internal work messaging systems, are not immune to TFGBV, demonstrating the need for stricter monitoring and better enforcement of digital conduct policies. Email, although seemingly more formal, can also be used to send unwanted messages or threats.

Impact of TFGBV on affected women in the workplace

The consequences of TFGBV extend beyond the digital sphere, affecting the psychological, emotional, and professional well-being of affected women in the hospitality sector. The survey data reveal a range of detrimental effects, as shown in the figure below.

Increased stress and anxiety were among the most frequently reported impacts. The constant fear of harassment, uncertainty about who the perpetrator might be, and the emotional toll of managing unwanted digital interactions all contribute to heightened stress and anxiety levels among victims. Many respondents reported experiencing depression or general emotional distress as a result of TFGBV. The feelings of helplessness, shame, anger, and violation can lead to prolonged periods of sadness and a diminished sense of self-worth, the same effects commonly documented in previous research (see Killoren, 2014 & Sharma et al., 2024). The psychological burden of TFGBV often translates into a decline in professional capabilities. Victims may struggle to

concentrate, feel less motivated, and experience reduced productivity due to ongoing emotional strain. In efforts to protect themselves, some women resorted to avoiding digital communication tools essential for their work. This can hinder collaboration, limit communication with clients, and reduce overall job effectiveness, sometimes further potentially isolating them.

Figure 5. Impact of TFGBV

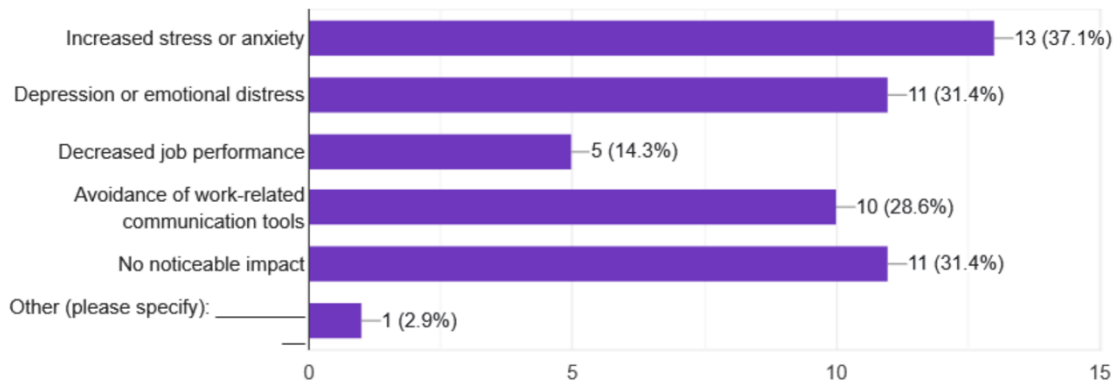
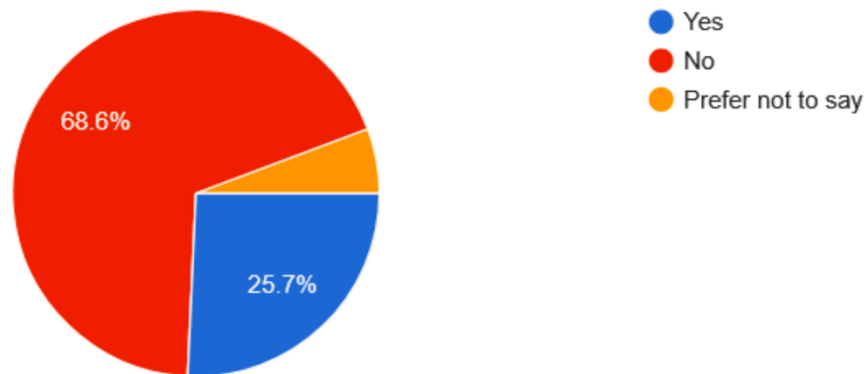


Figure 6. Reporting TFGBV

Did you report the incident(s) of TFGBV to your employer or supervisor?

35 responses



A notable finding is the pervasive fear among victims regarding the reporting of incidents. Many expressed concerns about being blamed for the harassment, facing retaliation from perpetrators (especially when these individuals were superiors), or even losing their jobs. Such fears contribute to a culture of silence, allowing TFGBV to persist unchecked. The perception that reporting would be ineffective or that management would not provide adequate support contributed to a loss of trust, eroding confidence in internal mechanisms designed to protect employees and address grievances.

When asked why they did not report, some respondents stated:

The manager always gets the upper hand.

Fear of retribution.

Fear of retaliation, fear of losing the job.

I thought it would end.

The perpetrator was related to the boss.

Because no action was going to be taken against the perpetrator

Fear of victimization and also fear of drawing a lot of attention to myself.

The person is the head of the hotel and insists that no one will ever stop him from making decision he wants to do, can either terminate or relocate.

A critical pattern observed in the data is the low rate of reporting TFGBV incidents. Despite experiencing harassment, many women chose not to report, primarily due to the aforementioned fears and a lack of faith in the system. Reasons for not reporting include fear of victimization or blame, where victims often internalized the blame or fear of being seen as problematic if they had reported. Fear of retaliation, especially when the perpetrator was a supervisor or colleague, presented a major deterrent due to the risk of professional repercussions. In a competitive job market, the threat of losing employment can silence victims, leading to fear of job loss. A belief that reporting would be ineffective, stemming from a lack of confidence in the organization's ability or willingness to address TFGBV effectively, discouraged reporting. Additionally, some respondents may not have been aware of or trusted the available reporting mechanisms, suggesting a lack of clear reporting channels.

Awareness and effectiveness of existing workplace policies

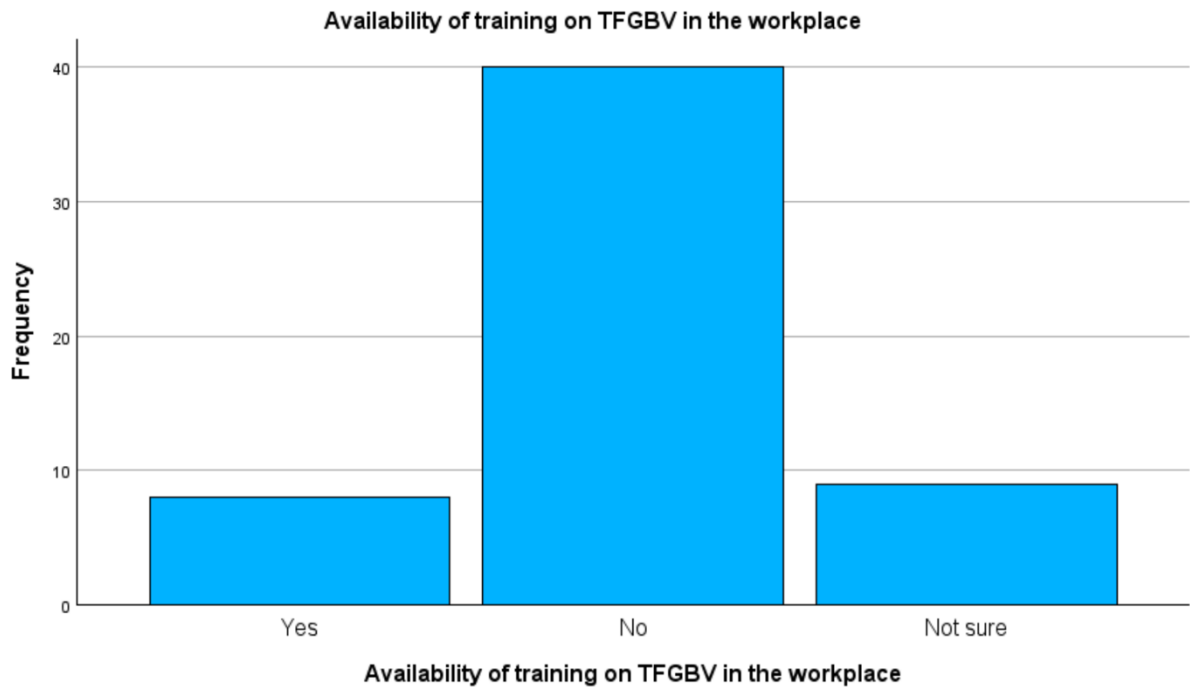
The survey data indicate gaps between the existence of policies and their perceived effectiveness and implementation in addressing TFGBV within the Zimbabwean hospitality sector. Awareness of existing workplace policies on TFGBV was inconsistent among respondents. While some were aware of such policies, a notable portion either had no knowledge of them or were unsure, suggesting that even if policies exist, their communication and dissemination are often inadequate. Some respondents indicated that their workplaces lacked specific policies addressing TFGBV, instead relying on general anti-harassment policies that may not adequately cover the distinctions of digital violence.

Table 2. Awareness of policies that address TFGBV

| Are you aware of any policies that address TFGBV? | | |
|--|----------|----------|
| | N | % |
| Yes | 13 | 22.8% |
| No | 33 | 57.9% |
| Not sure | 11 | 19.3% |

The availability of training on TFGBV was also found to be limited, with many respondents reporting that they had not received any specific training on how to identify, prevent, or report TFGBV.

Figure 7. Availability of training on TFGBV in the workplace



Even where training was provided, its effectiveness was often questioned. Training that is generic, infrequent, or not tailored to the specific challenges of TFGBV may not equip employees with the necessary knowledge and tools. A significant number of respondents rated the effectiveness of current policies in protecting workers from TFGBV as "somewhat effective" or "not effective."

This assessment highlights a disconnect between policy intent and practical outcomes. Reasons for perceived ineffectiveness include a lack of enforcement, as policies, even if well-intentioned, are ineffective without consistent and rigorous enforcement. Insufficient disciplinary action against perpetrators may lead to a perception that policies are not taken seriously. Ambiguous or inaccessible reporting channels deter victims from coming forward, indicating a lack of clear reporting mechanisms. Additionally, victims often feel unsupported by their employers or HR, even after reporting, highlighting the absence of adequate support systems.

Respondents offered valuable suggestions for improving the effectiveness of policies and frameworks. There was a strong call for the development and implementation of explicit policies specifically addressing TFGBV, outlining definitions, prohibited behaviors, reporting procedures, and disciplinary actions. Regular campaigns and communication efforts were highlighted as necessary to ensure that employees are aware of TFGBV, its forms, impact, and available support, thus increasing awareness and education. Training should be mandatory, comprehensive, and tailored to the digital landscape, equipping

employees and management with the skills to prevent, identify, and respond to TFGBV. This is what some of the respondents had to say:

That perpetrators should be dealt with regardless of the positions and relationship to the employer.

A lot of policies in the workplace mostly talk about Gender Based violence in general. More education and awareness should be done on TFGBV.

Frequent trainings.

Follow-ups and actually dealing with the perpetrators.

*Ensuring that they make policy, and that policy is upheld
more trainings.*

Use communication channels to ensure employee safety.

Educating women on harassment.

Holding meetings on a regular basis with clients so as to address such issues.

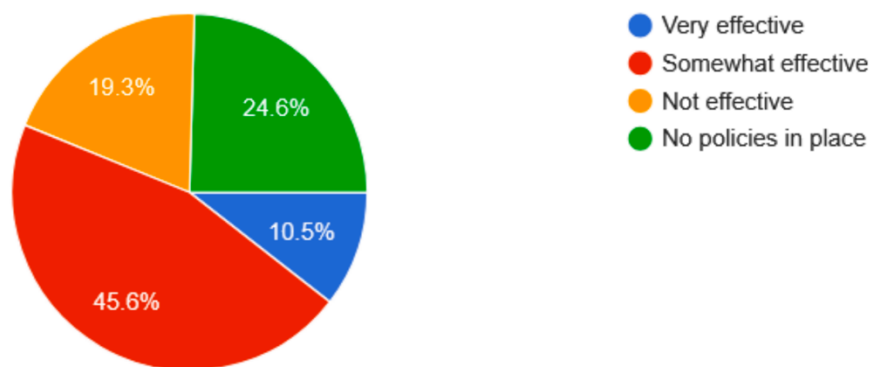
Establish a confidential reporting system to ensure that employees feel safe reporting incidents.

If only we can be heard

Figure 8. Effectiveness of TFGBV training

In your opinion, how effective are the current policies in protecting workers from TFGBV?

57 responses



Establishing safe, confidential, and accessible reporting channels is crucial to encourage victims to come forward without fear of reprisal. There is a need to create an atmosphere where all reported incidents will be thoroughly investigated, and appropriate disciplinary action must be seen to be taken against perpetrators to demonstrate a commitment to a zero-tolerance approach, ensuring that serious incidents receive thorough investigation and prompt action. Finally, employers should offer robust support systems for

victims, including counselling, legal assistance, and measures to ensure their safety and well-being.

Discussion

This paper provides insights into the pervasive and multifaceted nature of TFGBV experienced by women working in Zimbabwe's hospitality sector. The observed prevalence of various TFGBV forms, particularly unwanted sexual messages and the use of social media for rumor-spreading, demonstrates a vulnerability within the hospitality industry. This is not merely an extension of traditional workplace harassment into the digital sphere; rather, it signifies how the industry's increasing reliance on ICTs for operations and customer engagement, while enhancing efficiency, simultaneously creates new avenues for digital abuse. This aligns with the feminist political economy of labor framework (See Reyes & Sutton, 2021), which posits that TFGBV is not an isolated act, but a systemic issue rooted in the political and economic structures that perpetuate gender inequality in the workplace. In this context, the digital realm becomes another arena where existing power imbalances are exploited, rather than a neutral space. The "feminization of care work" prevalent in hospitality, where women are often in roles demanding attentiveness and emotional labor, inadvertently exposes them to increased risks of violence (see Gibbs et al., 2021; Waudby & Poulston, 2017, and Ysegnal, 2023), including technology-facilitated forms, as highlighted in the literature review.

The identification of supervisors, managers, colleagues, and clients as perpetrators is particularly significant. The involvement of those in positions of authority (supervisors/managers) and internal colleagues points to an abuse of power within the workplace, where male individuals leverage their status or proximity to harass or abuse subordinates and peers digitally. This resonates strongly with existing literature on workplace power imbalances and harassment (Vizcaino et al., 2020; Hadjisolomou et al., 2023), suggesting that TFGBV is often an extension of pre-existing hierarchical and social inequalities. The inclusion of clients/customers as perpetrators further highlights the unique vulnerabilities of hospitality workers, who are often expected to maintain a professional demeanor even when facing harassment, blurring the lines between professional interaction and personal violation.

The impact of TFGBV on affected women, including increased stress, anxiety, depression, decreased job performance, and the avoidance of work-related communication tools, is consistent with broader research on the psychological and professional consequences of gender-based violence (See Blindow et al., 2024, and Iroegbu, 2024). The psychological burden often translates into a decline in professional capabilities, with victims finding it difficult to concentrate, feeling less motivated, and experiencing reduced productivity due to the emotional toll. The avoidance of essential digital communication tools is a particularly salient finding, indicating that TFGBV also disrupts professional communication and potentially productivity within the sector, creating a tangible negative feedback loop for both employees and organizations. These findings reinforce the understanding that TFGBV has tangible, detrimental effects on both individual well-being and organizational functioning.

A critical finding is the pervasive fear among victims regarding reporting incidents, driven by concerns about blame, retaliation (especially from superiors), or job loss. This fear creates a culture of silence, allowing TFGBV to persist unchecked and eroding confidence in internal mechanisms designed to protect employees and address grievances. This directly challenges the effectiveness of existing workplace policies and legal frameworks, suggesting that even where policies exist, their implementation and enforcement are perceived as inadequate or unsafe. This aligns with the organizational behavior and workplace violence frameworks, which emphasize that a lack of trust in reporting mechanisms and perceived impunity for perpetrators are significant barriers to addressing workplace harassment effectively (See Asamani, 2016; and Lim et al., 2022). The reluctance to report suggests that current policies are either insufficient in their scope, poorly communicated, or inadequately enforced, failing to provide a safe and supportive environment for victims.

The study's findings highlight the need for context-specific policy reforms within the Zimbabwean hospitality sector, which we believe will also be applicable across many other sectors or industries in the country. Policies must explicitly define TFGBV, outline clear reporting procedures that protect victims from retaliation, and ensure swift, impartial investigations. Comprehensive anti-harassment policies that specifically address digital forms of violence and extend protection to employees from all perpetrators, including supervisors, colleagues, and clients, are overdue. Also, policies should mandate regular training for all staff, including management, on TFGBV awareness, prevention, and response, with an emphasis on bystander intervention.

Organizations within the hospitality sector have to move beyond mere policy formulation to active implementation and encourage a supportive workplace culture. This includes establishing confidential and accessible reporting channels, such as anonymous hotlines or designated, trusted personnel. Employers have to invest in digital literacy and safety training for employees, which equips them with strategies to protect themselves online and recognize TFGBV. Creating a culture of zero tolerance for TFGBV, where perpetrators are held accountable regardless of their position, is paramount. Support services, including psychological counselling and legal aid referrals, have to be made available to victims.

Future research could investigate the long-term effects of TFGBV on the career progression and economic stability of women in the hospitality sector. Comparative studies across different industries and regions within Zimbabwe could provide further insights into contextual variations. Additionally, research focusing on the effectiveness of specific interventions and policy implementations in mitigating TFGBV would be valuable. Qualitative studies examining the lived experiences of victims and perpetrators can provide deeper insights into the motivations underlying TFGBV.

CONCLUSION

This study provides one of the pioneer empirical studies of TFGBV within Zimbabwe's hospitality sector and demonstrates how the digitalization of work

has extended gendered vulnerabilities into online spaces. The findings demonstrate that unwanted sexual messages, digital slander, and non-consensual sharing of intimate content are pervasive, often normalized, and primarily perpetrated by supervisors, colleagues, and clients. These experiences inflict psychological and professional harm, including stress, anxiety, and withdrawal from digital communication tools that are essential for career advancement.

The research also reveals that TFGBV is not an isolated phenomenon but rather a manifestation of deeper structural inequalities in the hospitality industry, an occupational space already shaped by gendered hierarchies and economic precarity. Viewed through a feminist political economy and intersectional lens, the study shows how technology acts as both an enabler and amplifier of patriarchal power, transforming pre-existing offline vulnerabilities into new digital forms of surveillance, control, and harassment. Women's underreporting of TFGBV, driven by fear of retaliation, stigma, and institutional inaction, highlights the inadequacy of workplace protection systems and the absence of survivor-centered support.

Policy and document reviews further reveal that current labor laws and workplace frameworks in Zimbabwe remain ill-equipped to address TFGBV. They lack specificity, enforceable standards, and digital safety provisions aligned with emerging international norms such as ILO Convention No. 190. As such, addressing TFGBV demands an integrated approach that recognizes it simultaneously as a gender equality, labor, and digital rights issue. Employers, policymakers, and regulators are encouraged to adopt comprehensive, gender-responsive, and technology-aware interventions to ensure safe, dignified, and inclusive workplaces for women in the hospitality industry and beyond.

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ABOUT

SALASIKA etymologically derived from Javanese language meaning 'brave woman'. SALASIKA JOURNAL (SJ) is founded in July 2019 as an international open access, scholarly, peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary journal publishing theoretically innovative and methodologically diverse research in the fields of gender studies, sexualities and feminism. Our conception of both theory and method is broad and encompassing, and we welcome contributions from scholars around the world.

SJ is inspired by the need to put into visibility the Indonesian and South East Asian women to ensure a dissemination of knowledge to a wider general audience.

SJ selects at least several outstanding articles by scholars in the early stages of a career in academic research for each issue, thereby providing support for new voices and emerging scholarship.

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There are other journals which address those topics, but SJ approaches the broad areas of gender, sexuality and feminism in an integrated fashion. It further addresses the issue of international collaboration and inclusion as existing gaps in the area of academic publishing by (a) crossing language boundaries and creating a space for publishing and (b) providing an opportunity for innovative emerging scholars to engage in the academic dialogue with established researchers.

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